

# BQA and the stocker operator

by **ERIC GRANT**

For stocker operators, the challenges of implementing beef quality assurance (BQA) are similar to those of cow-calf producers, says Bill Mies, a former Texas A&M University Extension specialist who recently joined Future Beef Operations LLC.

“Stocker operators make a business out of the utilization of forage,” he explains. “The technology that has been passed along has always been how to create more. This meant more pounds, more performance and more efficiency. But quality wasn’t always part of the equation.

“Today, quality must be considered. In order to produce a quality product, producers must adopt correct use of injections, implants and brands.”

The challenge for stockers is that the genetic design of their cattle has been set prior to the time that the stocker operator buys the calf. “In the past, the stocker operator has simply bought cattle that were light in weight and fleshing to try to achieve maximum average daily gain (ADG),” Mies explains. “The stocker operator did not get very concerned about whether his final

product fit into the needs of the current industry.”

This was brought home to the industry in 1991 when stocker operators bought heavy-weaning-weight calves and put them on grass, Mies says. Many of these calves did not reach the feedyards until they weighed 900-1,000 pounds (lb.). They then weighed 1,400 lb. or more before they had achieved a minimal number of days in a feedyard prior to slaughter.

Two undesirable things then occurred. The beef tonnage on the market was unacceptably high, and carcass weights were so high that merchandising the resulting product was difficult. Both of these occurrences adversely affect prices.

The lesson to be learned is that stocker operators must decide at the time of purchase what type of final product is appropriate for them to produce, then find the calves that will feed to those end points.

“This will mean that stocker operators will likely try to find calves that are medium in frame size and light in weight to place on grass and then deliver to a feedyard at a weight that will allow the feedyard to feed the calf for at least 100 days, to try to ensure

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quality in the finished product and still market at a weight that fits into a packer box and a consumer plate,” Mies says.

The final area of concern for stockers and backgrounders is body composition. “The stocker operator has sold weight in the past to the feedyard,” Mies says. “As feedyards try to produce a quality product with a predictable and appropriate composition, they will ask stocker operators to provide them with a beginning product that can be used to hit their targets.”

